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Investigation findings in the alleged dress code violation at MCHS

On Tuesday, August 24, 2021, Mr. Gasaway received an email from the family of an MCHS student expressing concerns regarding the handling of an alleged dress code violation.

“After reading the email, I responded and assured them that I would look into the matter,” stated Gasaway. “It was later brought to my attention that this matter was the subject of several posts on social media with several comments and shares over the course of last evening.” According to details in the email from the family, the situation arose when the student told their parents that an MCHS teacher approached them in the hallway and told them that they needed to put on a jacket, change their t-shirt, or go home as the shirt they were wearing could be offensive to others. The student was wearing a blue t-shirt with the name of a business on the front and a flag printed on the back.

Gasaway immediately began inquiring on the matter. However, due to the public nature of the allegations, Gasaway and Assistant Principal Mr. Ronnie Lawhead worked with Madison Consolidated School’s SROs to open a formal investigation into the matter. “After five hours of video surveillance of the hallway in question, we can state with certainty that this student and said teacher had no contact at all during the timeframe of the alleged confrontation,” Gasaway continued. “As a matter of fact, the student was seen in the hallway at the time of the alleged incident with a backpack on which covered the back of the t-shirt in question.” SROs also separately viewed the video surveillance and agreed that it appeared that there was no indication of either verbal or non-verbal contact between the teacher, the accusing student, or said witness/friend of the student. As part of the investigation, other students identified in the vicinity were brought in and questioned in the matter and none were aware of the situation. The results of the joint investigation determined that there was no incident between the student or the teacher and that the shirt is school-appropriate.

The students directly involved, as well as their parents, were brought in and presented with the findings of the investigation. “I am thankful for the resources in place that we could quickly and accurately determine the facts of this incident,” Gasaway continued. “These types of allegations are upsetting. We try to teach our students the impact of misinformation and the scope of reach especially when placed on social media. This is a situation that we would have preferred to work through privately with this student and family but felt we needed to clarify for the broader public what actually happened.”

MCHS recently experienced criticism over the cover design of the 2021 yearbook. In an email to parents last week, Gasaway acknowledged concerns regarding controversial images on the cover and reiterated that the process for the selection of student artwork was under review. Gasaway stated, “We are all human with different filters, perspectives, and beliefs and we try to honor and respect those of everyone we interact with daily. We encourage our students to be critical thinkers, maintain

an open mind, have meaningful conversations, and be respectful of individuals and the things around them.”

“We are in a place in history where we can learn from those who have walked before us,” shared Dr. Jeff Studebaker, Superintendent. “Things in the world today are similar to those events from the ’60s where there were disagreements, violence, and polarizing viewpoints. Our goal, as educators, parents, mentors, and students, is to learn from those events. Recognize there are several ways to approach learning, recognize others’ opinions without vilifying one another, and emerge from this in a better place as a result of past experiences.”

“What we cannot have at school, or any other place, is an individual or group creating their own ‘truth’ and sending it out into the social media world calling it fact,” Studebaker continued. “This is a dangerous slope. The internet is a great resource when used correctly and we begin teaching our students at a very early age the appropriate use of this tool and the consequences and impact of inappropriate use. We know we will not stop all of the shenanigans, however, we do hope that we have ingrained a process of thought by which each student carefully considers the impact of their digital footprint when they are creating and posting content on the internet through social media. It is there forever.”

“We are very fortunate to have resources available to conduct investigations such as this in a timely manner,” stated Studebaker. “The foundation under these resources will always lie in truth. Our SROs are committed to the time, effort, and diligence necessary to determine the facts in every case. Their job is to bring to light the information necessary to support our students, staff, and administrators; or to also recommend discipline when necessary. We have a great working relationship with all of our law enforcement professionals and they have been an incredible addition and play a vital role in our district.”